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Eric Funkhouser

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Prima facie, there is an incompatibility between God's alleged omnipotence and impeccability. I argue that this incompatibility is more than *prima facie*. Attempts to avoid this appearance of incompatibility by allowing that there are commonplace states of affairs that an omnipotent being cannot bring about are unsuccessful. Instead, we should accept that God is not omnipotent. This is acceptable since it is a mistake to hold that omnipotence is a perfection. God's moral perfection should be privileged over God's potency properties—and the same is true of human beings as well.

> Some qualities seem to be conducive to this good will and can facilitate its action, but in spite of that they have no intrinsic unconditional worth. They rather presuppose a good will, which limits the high esteem which one otherwise rightly has for them and prevents their being held to be absolutely good. (Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*)

> I will extol You, my God, O King; and I will bless Your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless You, and I will praise Your name forever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and His greatness is unsearchable. One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works. Men shall speak of the might of Your awesome acts, and I will declare Your greatness. They shall utter the memory of Your great goodness, and shall sing of Your righteousness. (*Psalms* 145)

Introduction

Various well-known problems arise on the assumption that God is a perfect being. One of these problems concerns an apparent conflict between two properties that theists commonly attribute to God—impeccability and omnipotence. Let's define 'impeccability' as *essential moral goodness*. In possible worlds talk[1] an impeccable being is one that, minimally, does only morally good or permissible deeds in all the possible worlds in which it exists. In no possible world does an impeccable being perform a morally bad deed. I will not yet define 'omnipotence', as that is a subject of much controversy, which I address below. But, intuitively, an omnipotent being can do *everything* (in some restricted sense of this word), or at least more than any other possible being. But, since an impeccable being does not do a morally bad

deed in any possible world, it does not seem like an impeccable being *can* do some things. Worse, these are deeds that imperfect, finite beings can easily perform. How, then, can an impeccable being be omnipotent?

Let's get a concrete case before us:

> If God is omnipotent, then God possesses the maximum amount of power possible. A being that is maximally powerful could thrust a knife through an innocent child's chest for amusement. After all, finitely powerful creatures can do this. But if God is also impeccable, then God essentially refrains from performing morally bad deeds. An impeccable being could never (because such a being *would* never?) thrust a knife through an innocent child's chest for amusement. So we have a contradiction—God both can and cannot thrust a knife through an innocent child's chest for amusement.

This example presents a conflict between God's morality and power. Theorists who react to this conflict almost invariably attempt to avoid the difficulty by doctoring the intuitive understanding of 'omnipotence' so that God's omnipotence is compatible with his inability to perform certain deeds.[2] I will argue that this is a mistake. I will defend an understanding of omnipotence according to which omnipotence is incompatible with impeccability. (Impeccability is simply assumed, though not necessarily endorsed, as a perfection.) But I do not see this as a problem for theism, as I see no reason, except for a misguided attempt at reverence, to attribute omnipotence to the perfect being. Implicitly at least, most of us realize that God's moral goodness should be privileged over his metaphysical powers, and I openly embrace and defend this conception of God.

The Perfections

Let us say that God, if God exists,[3] is the perfect being, or the being most worthy of worship and praise.[4] Then, to inquire after the properties possessed by God is to inquire after the properties possessed by the perfect being.[5] These properties are commonly called the *perfections*, and they customarily include omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. They are also typically taken to be *essential* properties of a perfect being.[6] While perfections other than these three have certainly been argued for and/or asserted, I will limit my discussion of God's perfections to these three. I also assume that there are at least two components to being a perfection. First, a perfection is an intrinsically desirable or valuable type of property. Second, a perfection is the maximum possible value (perhaps infinite value) of that property.

We can apply these two components to the alleged perfection omniscience. Those who advocate the view that omniscience is a perfection are committed to: 1) knowledge being an intrinsically desirable or valuable property, and 2) God possessing the maximum amount of knowledge. We can also see why both components are necessary. Omni-massiveness is not a perfection due to the failure of the first component—mass is not an intrinsically desirable or valuable property. And doing-good-most-of-the-time is not a perfection due to a failure of the second component—it would

be better to do good all of the time! Those in the Anselmian tradition would offer a third component to the perfections—that a perfection is an *essential* property, as we have previously mentioned.

Well-known troubles have been raised against the possibility of a being possessing the three customary perfections. The Problem of Evil, for example, arises when these three alleged perfections are conjoined with apparent moral and natural facts about the world. But this is not an argument against the *possibility* of a being with these three perfections, it is "only" against its actuality. Other problems arise when we attend to these perfections themselves (absent any empirical considerations). These *conceptual* objections argue against the very possibility of such a perfect being. We can distinguish between *internal* conceptual objections to alleged perfections, as considered in isolation, and *external* conceptual objections to combinations of alleged perfections. For example, some have argued that the very concept of omnipotence is incoherent, so it cannot be a perfection.[7] Similar arguments have been raised against the very possibility of an *essentially* morally perfect being.[8] In the present terminology, these are internal objections. The conflict that interests us, as it deals with the possibility of an omnipotence-impeccability combination, is an external objection (to one conception of the perfect being). It is natural that such a conflict between God's moral goodness and potency should arise, as both properties concern the limitations, or lack thereof, on the actions that God can and will perform.

On the Perversion of a Perfectly Good Word

Many within the theistic tradition have responded to the impeccability-omnipotence conflict by claiming that God cannot do the immoral actions in question, but that these limitations are consistent with God's omnipotence (see footnote 2). Many of these theorists go on to construct a definition of 'omnipotence' whereby omnipotence is compatible with such limitations. I think this is mistaken.

But before presenting my argument for this, I would like to acknowledge the ways in which omnipotence is, or at least might be, compatible with certain limitations. I am understanding potency as the power to (i.e., *can*) bring about states of affairs.[9] Taking 'omnipotence' with literal seriousness, an omnipotent being is one that can bring about all states of affairs. But omnipotence in this sense is not possible. First, there are states of affairs that are impossible (in the strictest sense) to bring about, such as changing the past, squaring the circle, causing someone else's free action, etc. This point is acknowledged by all reasonable parties, and we immediately should weaken our understanding of 'omnipotence' to cover "only" all logically/metaphysically possible states of affairs. Second, even with this limitation in place, all individually logically/metaphysically possible states of affairs might not be *com*-possible. For example, state of affair X might be possible and state of affair Y might be possible, but the combination of X and Y is not possible. I agree that it is not logically/metaphysically possible to bring about, collectively, all the individually logically/metaphysically possible states of affairs. So, we should understand 'omnipotence' along the lines of supreme or maximal powerfulness:

an omnipotent being is one that can bring about the most (or a weighted most of the) logically/metaphysically possible states of affairs. For present purposes, we can stop with these acknowledgements and live with this, admittedly vague and incomplete, characterization.

Other claims are more definite and clear. A being is not omnipotent if there are possible beings more powerful than it. To deny this is to pervert the meaning of a perfectly good word—'omnipotence'—and to be talking about some other concept altogether. The following principle, which generates a necessary condition for omnipotence, captures this point:

> **The Maximality of Omnipotence:** If there is a possible being, B, that has the power to (i.e., can) bring about all the states of affairs that being A can bring about *and then some*, then being A is not omnipotent.

Here, then, is an extremely simple argument for the conclusion that a being that is unable to bring about immoral states of affairs is not omnipotent:

1. The Maximality of Omnipotence.
2. God does not have the power to (i.e., cannot) bring about morally bad states of affairs. God is impeccable, or essentially morally good. (Assumption)
3. There is a possible being with the power to bring about all the states of affairs that God can bring about *and then some* (e.g., morally bad states of affairs). (By 2 and conceivability)
4. God is not omnipotent. (From 1 and 3)

Clearly the argument is valid, so let's consider the premises.

Premise 1

Again, 1 seems painfully obvious. Many theists wish to attribute omnipotence to God. But it does no good to keep the word by changing its meaning. Omnipotence concerns power, and if there are possible beings that can do more than God, then God clearly is not the most powerful of all possible beings and certainly not omnipotent. A community of speakers can change the meaning of 'omnipotence' if they wish, but that would be a misguided attempt at reverence. Calling a tail a leg does not make it one.

That said, a philosopher as great as Aquinas boldly rejected the present intuition by claiming: "To sin is to fall short of a perfect action, hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence. Therefore, it is that God cannot sin, because of His omnipotence."[10] On reading this passage, it is clear that Aquinas cannot be thinking of omnipotence as the power to bring about states of affairs. If omnipotence is the power to bring about states of affairs, as I am suggesting the term should be used, then the ability to sin (e.g., bring about morally bad states of affairs) is not "repugnant to omnipotence." On the contrary, it is yet another power! We certainly have this concept of God's powers (e.g., God as creator and sustainer of the universe), and it this concept that the present debate is about. Either Aquinas is simply mistaken in his claim, or he is talking about another concept.

Premise 2:

Since 2 is listed as an assumption, it seems immune from attack. Technically, only the second sentence of 2 is an assumption, however. The first sentence of 2 explains the assumption and equates "having the power to do X" with "can do X." This subtle movement is also found in the characterization of The Maximality of Omnipotence. But some will, and have, rejected this as a conflation of distinct concepts. What is undeniable by all parties, simply given the definition of 'impeccability', is that God cannot do certain actions. But some will distinguish "can do" from "having the power to do" and argue that God nevertheless has the power to do what God cannot do (I do hope that sounds odd!). Let's consider this objection in detail, as refuting it is most critical to defending the present understanding of 'omnipotence'.

One way this objection proceeds is by distinguishing among God's different faculties and their implications for various possibilities. For example, one might argue that God can do the stabbing *qua* omnipotent being, but not *qua* omnibenevolent (or impeccable) being. In saying this a distinction is made between God's faculties of power and morality, though these faculties are similar in that each contributes to determining those actions that God can perform (this jurisdictional overlap later proves to be crucial). The claim is that God's inability to do the stabbing *simpliciter* is not due to a lack of *power*, but due to God's moral character. This faculty-relativizing approach obviously divorces the question: "Does God have the power to do X?" from the, intuitively related, question "Is it possible for/can God to do X?"

This objection is best justified by example, and here I turn to one presented by Erik Wielenberg (2000). Let's say that Hercules is a very strong man, tested with various weight-lifting tasks and succeeding at them all. However, a trickster gives Hercules a mere 10-pound stone that he is unable to lift because it has been greased. Should we conclude that Hercules is not so strong after all, since he cannot lift this 10-pound stone? Wielenberg answers in the negative, pointing out that Hercules still has the *strength* to lift this stone (since he has lifted much heavier things) "*even though it is metaphysically impossible that he do so.*"[11] The general conclusion Wielenberg reaches from such examples is as follows:

> What I want to suggest is that just as it is a mistake to try to explicate omni-strength in terms of which objects a being can lift, it is also a mistake to try to explicate omnipotence in terms of which states of affairs a being can bring about.[12]

The application to our problem is obvious. God still can possess the power to do the stabbing, though, given his omnibenevolent essence, it is metaphysically impossible for God to do the stabbing.

This response relies on relativizing abilities to faculties. Relative to his gripping faculty, Hercules cannot lift the stone. But relative to his strength faculty, he can lift the stone. Relative to his morality faculty, God cannot stab the child. But relative to his potency faculty, God can stab the child. The comparison is not perfect, however, and perhaps a dissimilarity in the cases supports an objection to this response.

In the Hercules case, the gripping and strength faculties are two (among others) of the necessary components for lifting things in the ordinary physical manner. With respect to lifting the greased stone, Hercules meets the qualifications for one of the necessary components but not the other. This is why he cannot lift the stone *simpliciter*. It is appropriate to specify that Hercules' failure is in virtue of his gripping faculty inadequacies, and not in virtue of his (physical) strength faculty. The strength of Hercules has not yet been impugned. These conclusions about Hercules are granted.

Of course, we should not confuse physical strength with the broader concept of power (and I am not accusing Wielenberg of this confusion). Physical strength certainly contributes to one's powers, though it is neither necessary nor sufficient for having power. Against necessity: God has the power to create the Earth, though lacking the physical strength (on the assumption that God is not a physical being). Against sufficiency: Hercules has the physical strength to lift the greased stone, but he lacks the power. In order to have the power to lift greased stones, one also must possess proper gripping power.

We have seen, as in the case of Hercules, that we can sometimes divide the power to do x into component parts (faculties). Does this also hold for God? God, I am assuming, is not a physical being, and does things by will alone.[13] The immediate connection between will and outcome, in the case of God, eliminates the need for other faculties in God's production of outcomes. Importantly, this point breaks the analogy between Hercules and God. If God does things by will alone, then God cannot do things relative to some faculty or other. Instead, God always has (or lacks) the power to do something *simpliciter* (and never only relative to some faculty).

So, in order to determine if God has the power (*simpliciter*) to do x, we simply need to determine if God has the will power to do x. But this inquiry into God's will power is ambiguous. We may be asking:

i) If God were to will to do x, would x obtain? or

ii) Could God will to do x?

On the assumption of impeccability, the correct answer to question ii) is "no." I have argued that, with this information in hand (in conjunction with premises 1 and 3), we can now legitimately conclude that God is not omnipotent. Let's take x to be the stabbing of an innocent child. God could not will to stab an innocent child (from impeccability). If God cannot will to stab the innocent child, then God does not have the will power to stab the innocent child. (How else should we understand *will power*? Are we to say that God cannot will the action *qua* impeccable being, but can will the action *qua* [fill in the blank]? But how can we fill in this blank, given that God's power is God's will?) But will power is the only kind of power God has.[14] So, God does not have the power to stab an innocent child.

Those who disagree, however, may interpret the inquiry into God's will power in the question i) sense. So, the relevant question for this opponent is: If God were to will to stab an innocent child, would that obtain? Thinking that the answer here is "yes," this opponent concludes that God has the power to do wrong (even though God cannot do wrong).[15] One obvious complication here is that we are dealing with a conditional with a necessarily false antecedent. I am not sure how to evaluate this conditional.

Even if conditionals with necessarily false antecedents can be non-trivially true, why think that the answer to i) is "yes" (on the assumption of impeccability)? Why not think that God's moral nature is privileged in a robust sense, so that God would be unable to stab an innocent child even if, as is impossible, God so willed? Needless to say, I have serious doubts that a "yes" answer to question i) is correct. But *even if it is*, it does not establish God's omnipotence. For, God's omnipotence is established only if God can so will. As has been argued by others[16], the inability to will or decide can itself detract from one's powers. Maybe it is true that Katie would be a very successful mathematician were she to dedicate herself to that avocation. But, for psychological reasons, she is unable (literally, unable) to so dedicate herself. Some may argue that Katie has the power to be a very successful mathematician because of the truth of the above conditional. But if the psychological condition is genuine, then it seems obvious to me that, sadly, Katie does not have the power to be a very successful mathematician. The analogy to God should be obvious.

I have argued that we should equate power with "can do." Let's consider a different objector, one who agrees with this equation. But this objector argues that, contrary to what has been assumed thus far, God *can* stab the innocent child, though, because of impeccability, in no world does God stab the innocent. Why does this objector think God can stab the innocent? Because in other possible worlds God moves the knife, or a knife-like object, in a "stabbing manner" into various objects. Perhaps in some worlds God even stabs evil-doers as a legitimate punishment. In virtue of these facts about other possible worlds, this objector claims that God can stab the innocent child of our actual world.

Of course God has the power to move the knife in a "stabbing manner," and perhaps God even has the power to stab evil-doers. But can God stab the innocent? There are at least two components to this question. Can God a) move an object in this manner, b) into someone with certain moral properties? The first component picks out a purely physical counterpart relation that is satisfied—God can move knives in a "stabbing manner." But our question adds a moral component, b), to the counterpart relation. And there are no possible worlds in which God moves a knife in a "stabbing manner" into a morally innocent person. The counterpart relation with both physical and moral components is not satisfied. So, God cannot stab an innocent child.

Premise 3

We can conceive of various possible beings that differ with respect to their powers to bring about states of affairs. There is no contradiction in the idea of a being with the power to bring about all the states of affairs that God can bring about, but also with the power to bring about immoral states of affairs. Such a being would, *by definition*, fail to be impeccable. And it is absurd to think that our ethical concepts rule out the possibility of such a (more powerful) being.

It is not good enough to respond: "True, in light of this possible being with the power to bring about immoral states of affairs, God is not omnipotent. Still, God is *almighty*. That is, God has power over all things." It may be that God has power over all *actual* things. But, being almighty in this

sense is not good enough for divinity (let alone omnipotency). For, we can conceive of worlds in which very limited creatures nevertheless have power over everything else in the world. As the limiting case of such thought experiments, I can imagine a world in which only I exist and am, therefore, almighty in this sense. This should show that almightiness should not be the standard for divine power, and God must be more than almighty.

Those in the Anselmian tradition will reject the tenor of the previous two paragraphs.[17] As a necessary and otherwise perfect existent, they object, God exists in all possible worlds and is the most powerful being in each world. The claims of this section, they continue, are simply examples in which conceivability does not track possibility. Yes, it is conceivable that there be a being with the powers of God plus those powers excluded by impeccability, but by metaphysical necessity such "possibilities" are excluded.

First note, however, that the typical examples of alleged conceivability-to-possibility failures are different in kind. They involve either a misdescription of a genuine possibility (e.g., conceiving of watery-stuff as water instead of the distinct chemical kind XYZ) or a sketchy conception due to ignorance of scientific or mathematical/logical facts (e.g., conceiving of this exact same physical stuff but without consciousness, or conceiving of the falsity of Fermat's Last Theorem). My conception of a being with the powers of God, plus the powers to bring about immoral states of affairs, fits neither pattern. It does not involve a misdescription, since I am not assigning any name at all to the being I imagine—I am simply imagining it with certain powers. Nor does this conception seem to play on any scientific or logical ignorance—How could adding the power to stab the innocent violate a law of nature or logic? Instead, such a "possibility" is supposed to be ruled out by some strange, *sui generis* force of metaphysical necessity. The mind boggles when contemplating the nature of this force that forestalls the realization of the more-powerful being I imagine. One could always claim that conceivability is no guarantee of possibility, but for particular cases an explanation of the alleged failure should be at hand.

But second, note that I am agreeing with the Anselmian that God is the perfect being—we are simply disputing what this amounts to. In the next section, I argue that power is not intrinsically valuable. If that argument is successful, it will certainly undercut some of the concern over allowing for possible beings that have powers beyond those of God. But problems still appear to arise for my view on the assumption that necessary existence is a perfection. For, if God exists in every possible world (or in none), then I am committed to a possible world in which God exists along with a being that possesses God's powers and then some. The easy way out of this situation would be simply to insist (or argue) that necessary existence is not a perfection. Then, God can be admitted in some possible worlds, and this other powerful, but not impeccable, being in others. I judge this to be at least a live option. However, we could even agree with the Anselmian that necessary existence is a perfection. Then, if my conception tracks possibility, in some possible world God exists along with this other powerful being. I do not see how this possibility threatens God's perfection. Perfection may simply require, additionally, that God's will prevails in such a world.

Though I stand behind this defense of Premise 3, Premise 3 and Premise 1 (The Maximality of Omnipotence) could be weakened in a way that

preserves the conclusion. This modification also offers greater appeal to the Traditional Anselmian in virtue of jettisoning the conceivability premise which claims the possibility of a being more powerful than God. The modification is as follows.[18] Let's concede, against our original Premise 3, that there is no possible being that possesses all of God's powers and then some. Still, there are large classes of actual (and possible) beings that have powers that God lacks. I have in mind, in particular, the power to bring about various states of affairs forbidden by morality. We could replace Premise 1 with the following:

1'. If there is some class of actual beings B_1–B_n, each of whom has power *p*, and actual being A lacks *p*, then A is not omnipotent.[19]

This is supposed to be intuitive—"Look, we can all bring about some outcome that you cannot. You must not be omnipotent then." We then replace the conceivability premise, Premise 3, with the following statement of fact:

3'. There is a class of actual beings (e.g., some class of human beings), each of whom has the power, say, to cause morally forbidden harms to others, and God (assuming God exists) lacks this power.

The conclusion in 4 still follows. True, the Traditional Anselmian could insist that God cannot acquire this *p*, due to constraints on God's essence. (Perhaps we should then conclude that an omnipotent being is not possible.) But we could still rely on the intuitive pull of P1' to insist that God is not omnipotent.

Those who distort and weaken the meaning of 'omnipotence' do so, it seems, out of a sense of respect for God's omnibenevolence. It is generally left unexplained, however, why the converse cannot hold as well—i.e., distorting and weakening the meaning of 'omnibenevolence' or 'impeccability' out of respect for God's omnipotence. That is, the fact that God is omnipotent might be taken as more fundamental, and then God's omnibenevolence and impeccability could be understood as being morally good to the greatest extent that is compatible with being supremely powerful. If supreme power requires the ability to perform moral wrongs, then, by parity of reasoning, we would be entitled to conclude that an omnibenevolent (or even impeccable?!) being is one that nevertheless can do moral wrong (contrary to our premise 2).[20] In fact, this conclusion (which I am not endorsing) is more palatable than the alleged limitations on omnipotence, since omnipotence is clearly a modal notion and omnibenevolence is not clearly a modal notion. That said, I believe that our untutored, and un-perverted, understanding of 'potency' and 'benevolence' should stand. Omnipotency conflicts with impeccability, and I now turn to reasons for privileging moral properties in such situations of conflict.

A Kantian Inspired Justification

Kant famously argued that the only unqualified (unconditional and intrinsic) good is a good will.[21] While we do not have to accept this claim, it is worth returning to his reasons for denying that other qualities are good without qualification. Kant reasoned that not even power and intelligence

are good without qualification, as intelligence and power can be used toward evil ends. Presumably, Kant would claim that the power and intelligence of, say, the Devil are not valuable, as they are used to evil ends and are not *intrinsically* valuable. Recall that our first requirement for a perfection is that it be an intrinsically desirable or valuable property. We said that omni-massiveness is not a perfection, because omni-massiveness is not an intrinsically desirable or valuable property. I now wish to consider whether omnipotence meets this requirement. Many have assumed that it is, and have worshipped and praised God in virtue of his metaphysical greatness. But, is potency different than massiveness in this regard?

First, we should ask what is meant by an "intrinsically desirable or valuable property." Desirable or valuable *to whom*? Potency very well might be desired or valued by the powerful individual, but it in no way follows that the power of that individual is to be desired or valued from the third-person perspective. And the latter is the appropriate perspective for making evaluations of praise-worthiness and perfection. The Devil, let us assume, has great power. Putting aside his moral failings, is the Devil an object of (limited) worship, praise, or respect simply in virtue of his metaphysical greatness? We might envy or fear the Devil's power, but it does not seem like a trait worthy of worship, praise, or respect. As with earthly political figures, there may be prudential reasons to worship, praise, or respect the powerfulness of supernatural beings. But I fail to see the non-prudential reasons for so doing—it is not desirable or valuable from the third-person perspective.

If power were an intrinsic good, then beings with equal amounts of power would be equally praiseworthy in that respect. Assume a Super-Devil, with the perfections of God but for a moral inversion (along with any required changes in potency, due to impeccability concerns, that might arise from this). If the power of God is intrinsically valuable and praiseworthy (i.e., absent any consideration of God's other properties), then the power of the Super-Devil would similarly be intrinsically valuable and praiseworthy. But this seems perverse. The power of the Super-Devil is not intrinsically valuable and praiseworthy, and so similarly for that of God.

Of course we often do say that many traits, even when employed to ends we adamantly disagree with (on moral or other grounds), are worthy of respect in a non-prudential sense, though many of these traits are not fitting for divinity. A boxer may respect the physical strength of his hated foe. A mountain climber may respect the height of an imposing mountain. Or a military general may respect the acumen of his counterpart. Does the respect, and even reverence, many have for these traits, despite the (perceived) fact that they are not being employed to some morally good end, show that they are intrinsically valuable? And if height is intrinsically valuable, as in our case of the mountain, is omni-height a perfection we should attribute to God? Of course this is absurd, but wherein lies the difference between height and, say, moral properties? The difference is that in each of the examples of this paragraph, the property in question is not intrinsically valuable, but valuable only relative to the kind or task in question. Mountain climbers may respect the height of mountains, but dog breeders may respect the diminution of a Toy Poodle. Obviously, height is not prized equally for all kinds of beings. Similarly,

the physical strength of a boxer and the military acumen of a general are valued relative to a sporting or political environment. When we respect these traits, even in our sporting and political enemies, we are recognizing that they possess high values for a trait that is central to performing a given task. They are *conditional* goods, whereas moral goods are *categorical*. In the cases described above, we respect their *level* of ability (e.g., relative to other examples of their kind), not necessarily the ability itself (e.g., as compared to other traits one could have). When the boxer respects the physical strength of his opponent, he is rating the opponent's physical strength favorably as compared to other boxers and/or other possible values. The boxer needn't make any judgment, however, valuing strength as compared to other traits boxers can have (e.g., mental discipline, speed, or even friendliness, physical attractiveness, etc.).

Recall that we are operating on the stipulation that God is the perfect being. It is certainly not obvious, however, that there is a unique set of characteristics that we should attribute to such a being. Still, there are limitations and guiding rules for such attributions. My contention has been that only properties that are intrinsically valuable, or needed (as a means) to achieve something intrinsically valuable, should be attributed to God. Further, I have argued that moral properties, but not potency properties, are intrinsically valuable. This suggests the following speculative principle:

> **Ockham's Razor Thesis of Divine Potency:** Since potency is not intrinsically valuable (i.e., praiseworthy in a non-prudential sense), we should attribute potency to God only to the extent that such attributions are necessary to achieve what is intrinsically valuable.

Unlike Kant, I allow for the possibility that non-moral properties might be intrinsic goods. Epistemic properties might be such an example, consistent with attributions of omniscience to God. Minimally, a perfect being would have the knowledge and power to perform all (required, if not supererogatory) morally good actions.

The Earthly Moral

Philosophy of religion, like the space program, earns its keep not only from its own innovations and intrinsic interest, but also from the "spin-offs" it contributes to other areas. These philosophical spin-offs have included contributions to our understanding of modality, free will, personal identity, and, as in the present case, our concepts of power and morality. I wish to conclude by extending the above conclusions to the secular sphere. (We could reason in the other direction as well. That is, these secular claims, if accepted, can be extended to offer more support for our conclusion regarding God's limited potency.)

First, in evaluating our fellow humans and human institutions for their praiseworthiness—not in this or that particular regard, but simply as agents or people *period*—we should, and generally do, give their moral properties greater weight than their power properties. The athleticism or physical strength of another can be impressive or fear-inspiring (when directed in a mean-spirited way), but does not seem praiseworthy in our

third person, non-prudential sense. Nor is the power of a tyrant worthy of sincere praise.

Second, as with God, our moral properties can weaken our potency and limit our options. This observation coheres with ordinary observation and talk. A country whose military follows the Geneva Conventions is thereby put at a military disadvantage compared to a country that does not. When a wartime enemy uses innocent civilians to protect military interests, the other side, if bound by morality, has its options (i.e., what it *can do*) limited in virtue of this fact. And similar points hold in private affairs. An individual who is moral might be incapable of doing certain wrongs or failing to do good. Such a person can then be put in situations where this virtue is exploited. An unscrupulous father does not attempt to provide for his children. The grandparents are appalled. They have the financial means to support their grandchildren, but do not want to reinforce the irresponsibility of their son. The son is manipulative, and repeatedly asks the grandparents for financial support. The grandparents always give in. "We *couldn't* let our grandchild suffer," they explain to their friends when the exploitation is pointed out.

For both humans and divines, it is better to be good than strong. And sometimes being good makes you weaker. For these reasons, some can do more than God, but none is better.[22]

University of Arkansas

NOTES

1. I am not necessarily endorsing possible worlds talk as the grounds of modal claims, but accepting it at least for heuristic purposes.
2. This "doctoring" comes in various forms. Some argue that omnipotence should not be understood in terms of the power to bring about states of affairs, or that the "ability" to do evil is not a power, but a deficiency or liability (Anselm, Aquinas, Gellman, and Mawson), or that omnipotence only requires the ability to do what does not conflict with the rest of one's essence or with certain contingent features of the world (e.g., Gellman, Wierenga, and Flint and Freddoso). Others think that the above example presents a genuine conflict, and preserve God's omnipotency by giving up impeccability (Guleserian [1983]). I follow Morriston (2001) in holding that there is a genuine conflict between omnipotency and impeccability, and opting for denying God the former.
3. For the rest of this paper I will assume that God does exist, and omit this qualification. The inquiry will then be into God's nature.
4. I am aware that some will deny that the perfect being is the being most worthy of worship and praise. This equivalence should then be treated as an assumption. It certainly seems to me that, if there is a perfect being, it is the being most worthy of praise (*because* it is perfect). And, conversely, a being is perfect because it has those traits that are praiseworthy.
5. So, this is a work in the tradition of perfect being theology—compare with Morris (1987) and Gellman (1977), p. 31. No attempt will be made to reconcile this account of God with that offered by any of the world's major religions. I am not approaching this as someone with pre-set theological

views—e.g., assuming that God must have such-and-such properties. Rather, I am assuming that God is perfect, and then figuring out what properties God must have.

6. Essential omnibenevolence is equivalent to, or a species of, impeccability as defined above.

7. Geach (1973) and LaCroix (1977).

8. Guleserian (1985).

9. Compare this with Wierenga (1989), p. 14.

10. Aquinas, Pt. 1, Reply to Objection 2, Article 3, Question 25.

11. Wielenberg (2000), p. 37 (italics in original).

12. Wielenberg (2000), p. 38.

13. This suggests other limitations on God's power—e.g., God lacks the power to be a physical cause.

14. Significantly, this is why the Pike (1969) proposal to the omnipotence-impeccability conflict fails. Pike proposed that God had the ability to sin, but was strongly disposed never to exercise this ability. But I have argued that if God would never so will (i.e., exercise the ability), then God lacks this power/ability. God does not have anything like physical strength to fall back on to justify attributing the power/ability to sin.

So, on the present view, God's will is God's power. This means that limits on God's will are limits on God's power. If God's moral nature limits what he can will, then it also limits his power.

The present view agrees with Geach (1973) in the following regard: " . . . but what God cannot be said to be able to do he likewise cannot will to do; we cannot drive a logical wedge between his power and his will, which are, as the Scholastics said, really identical, and there is no application to God of the concept of trying but failing." (p. 8) And even more pertinent is the following: "Well, as regards a man it makes good sense to say: 'He has the bodily and mental power to do so-and-so, but he certainly will not, it would be pointlessly silly and wicked.' But does anything remotely like this make sense to say about Almighty God?" (p. 16) (Also compare with Gellman (1977), p. 34.)

15. Compare with Aquinas: "Now it is true that the philosopher says that *God can deliberately do what is evil*. But this must be understood either on condition, the antecedent of which is impossible—as, for instance, if we were to say that God can do evil things if He will. For there is no reason why a conditional proposition should not be true, though both the antecedent and consequent are impossible; as if one were to say: *If a man is an ass, he has four feet*." (Pt. 1, Reply to Objection 2, Article 3, Question 25.)

16. E.g., Morriston (2001), pp. 155–56.

17. Thanks to Tom Senor for drawing my attention to the problem raised in this paragraph.

18. This modification was also suggested by Tom Senor.

19. This formulation might need some qualification. For example, *de se* powers (e.g., powers of the form "the power to make it the case that I . . . ") present a complication. There are innumerable *de se* powers that we possess, but God lacks. I have the power to make it the case that I am riding a bicycle. But God lacks this *de se* power due to God's non-physical nature, let us suppose. It does not seem that this should count against God's omnipotence. It has already been acknowledged that lacking certain "powers"—e.g., to cause someone else's free action—does not count against omnipotence. *De se* powers seem to be of a similar kind. (I have the power to freely move *my* arm, God cannot make *my* arm move freely, but this does not threaten God's omnipotence.) Again, I prefer to think of powers as the ability to bring about certain states of affairs (outcomes). Lots of us can bring about a state of affairs in which an innocent person is wrongfully harmed (outcome). We are assuming that God

cannot do this. None of us can bring it about that God is riding a bicycle, so it should not count against God's omnipotence, as far as 1′ is concerned, that God cannot bring it about that God is riding a bicycle either.

20. Of course, I think it would be flat-out contradictory to say that such a being is impeccable. But my point is that it is also flat-out contradictory to say that a being that cannot do evil is omnipotent.

21. Kant (1990), First Section.

22. Thanks to Tom Senor for many extremely helpful discussions and comments on this paper.

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